

SOFTWARE

FAQ

Q I've seen the term VPN mentioned several times. What does it mean?

A The internet is a great way for computers to communicate with each other. However, it's designed to be a public network, so that any computer connected to it can see any other computer. If you want to talk privately to another computer or network, then you need a virtual private network (VPN).

VPNs still use the internet to communicate, but encrypt the link so that it cannot be spied on. A VPN also makes a PC appear as though it's physically connected to a remote network. Usually VPNs are used to let remote workers connect to an office network, where they can access shared files, applications and other resources.

LogMeIn's Hamachi (see the review on page 52) uses similar technology, but lets you create a VPN that other users can join. This allows you to construct a LAN over the internet to share files, play games and even share printers.

David Ludlow
Deputy Editor



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ABLETON

Live 6

★★★★★

£329 inc VAT

Ableton Live built its reputation on its Session View, which comprises a grid of audio loops that are triggered as a live performance in sync with a master tempo. It was, and still is, the best tool for dance music producers performing live, allowing tracks to be reworked and remixed on stage with incredible flexibility and precision. The software didn't come with a library of sounds, but the blank canvas encouraged producers to be more creative. Live's fantastic sound-sculpting tools meant it was possible to produce exciting music from the most basic of raw materials.

Live quickly found favour in the studio, too, where the improvisational approach of the Session View was a welcome relief to those who felt constricted by the linear timelines of other music-production software. Ableton responded with a series of updates aimed as much at studio production as live performance. This latest version competes with general-purpose production software such as Cubase and Sonar.

Instrument and Effect Racks is a new feature that should appeal equally to producers and performers. These allow bundled and VST plug-ins to be combined, saved and recalled for later use. You can hide their controls for the sake of neatness and program eight macro knobs to control any combination of parameters, making an easy front panel for complex multi-device racks. Plug-ins can be combined in parallel as well as series, perhaps to create a double-delay effect or to layer two MIDI instruments together. When combining instruments, there's further scope to limit each instrument to specific MIDI notes or velocities (volume). This is perfect for making a split MIDI keyboard with perhaps a bass and lead sound for live performance, creating a sound made up of separate samples for quiet and loud notes, or even complex instruments made up of dozens of samples assigned to different pitches and velocities.

The new Essential Instrument Collection uses Racks to good effect. It's a 14GB sample library that comes ready to play in the bundled Simpler instrument (a simple sampler) and covers a wide variety of sounds, although the emphasis is on simulations of acoustic instruments; there are more orchestral brass than synth bass presets, for example. The level of customisation is basic but the quality is excellent, with particularly good string ensembles and a convincing grand piano that draws on 3.5GB of samples all for itself. The downside to these massive sample pools is the streaming from hard disk that's necessary to play them. This can cause unexpected strains on a PC's resources, resulting in occasional glitches in playback, which would be unacceptable on stage. However, most of the sounds have more modest requirements, and in general the Essential Instrument Collection is great for anyone who uses a MIDI keyboard for composition, recording or performance.

Support for QuickTime video playback makes Live a contender for those writing incidental music to accompany moving pictures. It's a particularly strong



▲ Live 6 includes video support, new plug-ins and Instrument and Effect Racks



▲ The Essential Instrument Collection adds various acoustic and synthetic MIDI instruments to Live's palette

contender, as Warp Markers can be applied to videos, perhaps to identify cuts or key moments in the action, so the music's tempo follows the pace of the video to synchronise musical and visual events. Sadly, though, video support isn't geared towards live performance. It's possible to string more than one video clip together, but not to trigger video clips from Session View for live video remixing.

Other new features include an improved metering display that makes it clear when the master output is distorting, a couple of excellent analogue distortion effects, dual-core processor support and the ability to warp the timing of multiple tracks simultaneously. This is great for manipulating multi-microphone live recordings.

LIVE ACT

It's hard to compare Live with other professional audio software because it's so different. Its lack of compositing and crossfading tools (for combining multiple takes into a best-of version) means we prefer Sonar or Cubase for recording vocalists or a band, and its MIDI quantising features are surprisingly basic for software that's otherwise so well equipped for dance music production. Meanwhile, Sonar's new AudioSnap

feature gives Live's powerful Warp Markers a run for their money. However, the flexibility of Live's Session View shouldn't be underestimated for both stage and studio use, and with a comprehensive supporting cast of excellent features it seems unfair to award Live anything less than full marks.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fantastic live performance features
- ✓ Accomplished recording features
- ✗ Price continues to creep up

MUSIC-PRODUCTION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM (1GB recommended), 14.6GB disk space for full installation
SUPPLIER www.millennium-music.co.uk
DETAILS www.ableton.com

PARALLELS

Parallels Desktop for Mac

★★★★★

£45 inc VAT



Owners of Intel-based Macintosh computers have been able to run Windows XP thanks to the downloadable Boot Camp utility. This allows Windows applications to be run at full speed, but requires the Mac to be rebooted every time you want to use them, which can be inconvenient.

Parallels Desktop is a virtualisation utility that allows you to run a different operating system and its applications alongside your regular Mac OS applications. The obvious choice is Windows XP, with which we tested, but you can also run older versions of Windows, as well as DOS, Solaris, Linux and OS/2.

Installing both Parallels Desktop and Windows was easy thanks to a well-illustrated manual, although the interface for changing the amount of hard disk space devoted to your virtual Windows PC doesn't always work properly. We set our drive to be 160GB, but it was actually 200GB in size. Unfortunately, if you've already installed Windows as part of Boot Camp, you won't be able to use it with Parallels Desktop.

We tested an installation of Windows XP Professional Edition on

a MacBook Pro with a T2600 Core Duo processor and 2GB of RAM. We allocated 1GB of RAM to Parallels Desktop exclusively and ran our usual set of computer performance benchmarks. Parallels attained a score of 96 in our video-encoding test, 94 in our image-editing test, 89 in our multitasking test and 91 overall.

This is roughly equivalent to the performance we'd expect from a 3GHz Pentium 4, which is more than enough for running most everyday applications, but for taxing programs you'll get the best performance from Boot Camp. Parallels Desktop demands plenty of memory, especially if run alongside lots of Mac applications. You can run multiple versions of Windows, such as 98 and XP, at the same time, although you'll need even more memory and free hard disk space.

There's currently no support for DirectX, so you'll have to use Boot Camp if you want to play Windows-only games. But other Windows applications we tested ran without a hitch. We were able to connect to a local wireless network without fiddling with any TCP/IP settings in



▲ Windows XP Professional Edition running in a Mac OS X window

Windows, allowing us to browse the web and print to a networked laser printer. We also successfully synchronised files and contacts between a Windows Mobile smartphone and Microsoft Outlook over USB.

Any attached USB devices will work only at USB 1.1 speeds. You can copy and paste text between Mac and Windows applications, but not images. Files can be shared between the Mac OS and Windows by copying them into designated shared folders, although we wish we could just drag and drop files between the two operating systems. If you have a second monitor connected to your Mac, you can devote it to displaying just your Windows applications.

Apple's Boot Camp is the best option if you want to play Windows games or need the fastest possible performance. Parallels Desktop still has a few rough edges, but it's well designed and allows Macs to run Windows applications conveniently and quickly.

Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Don't need to reboot to use Windows
- ✓ Respectable performance
- ✗ Limited USB and games support

VIRTUALISATION SOFTWARE Requires Mac OS X 10.4.6 or later, Apple Mac with Intel processor, 512MB RAM
 SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
 DETAILS www.parallels.com

Also consider...

MICROSOFT
Works Suite 2006

★★★★★

£46 inc VAT



Microsoft Office may be the obvious choice of office suite, but it's expensive for home users and is very business-focused. Microsoft has a more home-friendly range of software in Works Suite 2006, and all for well under £100.

The package contains Word, Digital Image Standard, Money, AutoRoute Essentials, Encarta and the organiser that glues them all together, Works. However, you get the older 2002 version of Word rather than the newer Word 2003. As the new version provides better security, more options for tracking document changes and mark-up features used to prepare content for professional databases, the presence of Word 2002 is a disappointment.

The other packages are well worth the money, though, and provide pretty much every function the average home user will need. Unless you intend to use your PC to run a small business, Works Suite is a stunning collection of software at a bargain price.



OFFICE SUITE Requires Windows 98 SE or later, 700MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB disk space, Internet Explorer 6
 PRODUCT CODE B11-01360 SUPPLIER www.dabs.com DETAILS www.microsoft.com/worksuite Includes Word and handy home software such as Encarta ✗ Old version of Word FULL REVIEW Mar 2006

SONY
Vegas Movie Studio
+DVD Platinum
Edition 6

★★★★★

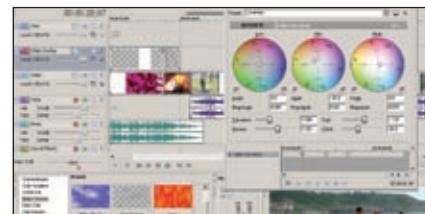
£59 inc VAT



Platinum Edition is new to the Vegas family and adds support for High-Definition Video cameras. With a range of new effects over the standard edition, including the excellent Colour Corrector, it's well worth the extra £15.

Movie Studio has finally caught up and even surpassed its rival, Adobe's Premiere Elements.

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 200MB disk space
 PRODUCT CODE SPVMSDV6000 SUPPLIER www.savastore.com DETAILS www.sonymediasoftware.com
 ✗ Lots of powerful new features ✗ DVD Architect Studio might be bewildering for beginners FULL REVIEW Dec 2005



QUARK QuarkXPress 7

★★★★

£812 inc VAT

The battle of the desktop publishing giants is back on. Having conquered Adobe PageMaker in the 1990s, Quark ill-advisedly rested on its laurels while Adobe stormed back into power with InDesign. But now Quark has launched QuarkXPress 7.

Its user interface is reassuringly familiar, except that the Measurements palette gains nine tabs showing properties from text formatting to transparency. At last you can adjust the opacity of any item and add soft drop shadows, InDesign features that Quark users have long coveted. There are still no blending modes (Color Burn, Multiply and so on), although these are preserved within imported Adobe Photoshop files, which QuarkXPress now handles better than InDesign. Picture Effects still don't work with Photoshop's .PSD format, however, and effects applied to type may break when you change fonts.

InDesign's effects feel more integrated. OpenType fonts are fully supported, and advanced users will welcome the addition of vertical spacing to the custom kerning tables. InDesign's optical spacing and optical margin alignment remain absent, though.

Two major new features address the modern DTP buzzword, workflow. Composition Zones let you hive off part of a page as a separate file that can be edited by someone else to prepare an advert, for example. Although Quark hasn't yet ironed out all the wrinkles, it's a good idea that will prove useful for some users.

For others, the most important innovation will be Job Jackets, a new system for defining, sharing and checking the specifications of print projects. You set up a Job Jacket with basic specifications such as colour swatches and page sizes that will apply to a group of documents, perhaps all your work for a particular brand or department. Within this, you create Job Tickets for specific document types.

The basic principle is fine, but the way it works is complicated, unintuitive and leaves far too much for you to do manually. You can't even preflight a document for basic errors without setting up a Job Ticket to check it against. InDesign's simpler approach, with presets for common tasks, is a lot more practical. We hope to



▲ The Measurements palette gains a set of tabs to access more properties, including the new Opacity and Soft Shadow options

see Quark's system become more usable as ready-made Job Jackets appear. Quark's focus on the back end of publishing is reinforced by other new products such as QuarkXPress Server and the Quark Print Collection. But it has allowed InDesign to stay ahead in the layout functions that people use every day.

The final problem for QuarkXPress is a perennial one: price. At more than £800 (£900 for the multi-language Passport version), it's more expensive than the entire Adobe Creative Suite, including InDesign, Photoshop and Illustrator. A more reasonable £300 upgrade is available from version 3 and higher, and there are generous discounts for students as well as site licence deals. QuarkXPress 7 contains some significant improvements and ideas, but it still needs work to match InDesign's creative usability.

Adam Banks

SUMMARY

- ✓ Transparency features
- ✗ Job Jackets hard to use
- ✗ Expensive

DESKTOP PUBLISHING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP, 128MB RAM, 250MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE 122141
SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS <http://euro.quark.com/en>

Also consider...

CLOUDMARK Desktop for Outlook

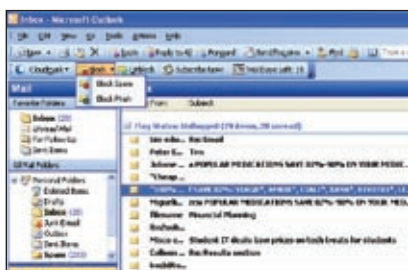
★★★★★

£24 inc VAT

BEST BUY Cloudmark Desktop is available for Outlook and Outlook Express. The software connects to a large database of spam messages maintained by other users, so it has a high probability of detecting spam. Any spam classifications you make are fed back into the database, improving Cloudmark's detection rates.

It was the clear winner of our Anti-Spam Labs test in *Shopper* December 2006.

ANTI-SPAM SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, Outlook or Outlook Express SUPPLIER Cloudmark 020 7100 5224 DETAILS www.cloudmark.com ✓ Excellent anti-spam detection ✗ Outlook/Outlook Express users only FULL REVIEW Dec 2006



MAGIX Audio Cleaning Lab 11 XXL

★★★★★

£45 inc VAT

BEST BUY Audio Cleaning Lab 11 XXL is a great way to convert your vinyl LPs to CD, cleaning up the sound in the process to give excellent results. This version includes all the necessary hardware you need to record directly from records to your PC. It's also a great tool for music and video production, and the audio CD-authoring tools are particularly good.

AUDIO-RESTORATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 500MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 100MB disk space PRODUCT CODE B000WZXMK SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk DETAILS www.magix.co.uk ✓ Complete package for converting vinyl ✗ Interface a bit rough around the edges FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



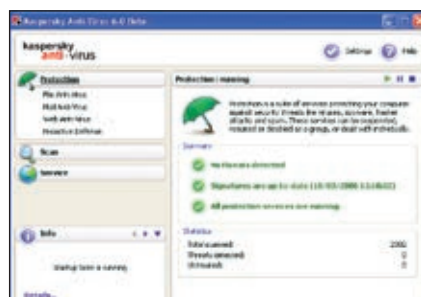
KASPERSKY Anti-Virus 2006

★★★★★

£28 inc VAT

BEST BUY Kaspersky's Anti-Virus scans all the usual areas for threats including email and web traffic, as well as your hard disk. It performed perfectly in our tests, detecting every sample that we threw at it. If you need to clean an infected PC, the option to create a bootable scanning CD is invaluable. It's well priced, simple to use and the top-notch protection will keep your PC safe.

ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 or later, 150MHz processor, 32MB RAM, 50MB disk space SUPPLIER Kaspersky 08700 113461 DETAILS www.kaspersky.com ✓ Effective detection and handy extra features FULL REVIEW Jun 2006



PINNACLE

Studio 10 Plus Titanium Edition
Special Anniversary Pack

★★★★

£59 inc VAT

With one of the longest product names in computing history, this latest incarnation of Pinnacle's home-oriented video-editing software comes with more extras than ever. There's the same bundle of effects, transitions and animated DVD menus that accompanied the Titanium Edition (*What's New: Software*, *Shopper* July 2006), plus lots more besides, bringing the installation to a whopping 4.2GB. This doesn't excuse Pinnacle's decision to present the software on five DVDs. Installation took well over an hour and we had to keep our wits about us to ensure we'd covered everything.

Considering that the software's name has three suffixes to advertise its additional content, we were amazed to discover that most of the effects and transitions installed required us to spend more money before we could use them beyond a demo mode. Prices such as £14 for an image overlay that makes your video look like a camcorder viewfinder are ridiculous, and buying all the premium content would set you back over £800.

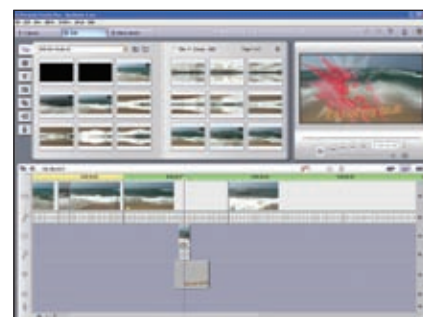
SUMMARY

- ✓ Beginner-friendly interface
- ✓ Reliability appears much improved
- ✗ Sometimes unresponsive and unreliable

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP (SP2), 1.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 64MB DirectX 9 graphics (2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, 256MB graphics for HDV), 4.2GB disk space, DirectX 9 sound card
PRODUCT CODE 202262443
SUPPLIER www.savastore.com
DETAILS www.pinnaclesys.com

Ignore the premium content, and the effects and transitions libraries are still great, with a solid set of corrective tools such as automatic colour correction and image stabilisation plus plenty of impressive special effects such as 3D explosions, fractal fire and earthquake simulators – ideal fodder for homemade disaster movies. However, if you're serious about special effects you'll soon get frustrated with the single video-overlay track, the crude object motion controls and the daft way that effects keyframes behave when trimming and splitting clips.

Our concerns over previous versions of Pinnacle Studio have been less about power and more about reliability. For over five years, each encounter with Studio has been punctuated by bugs, random errors, crashes and spontaneous reboots. In this respect, version 10.6 appears to be a big improvement. We suffered two crashes while testing, which is around a tenth as many as we've experienced while testing other versions. The bugs we identified last time have been remedied, too, but we also experienced some new



▲ There are plenty of dramatic effects on tap, but only two video and one text layer to play with

ones: previews sometimes played without any sound and once, after adding some text to a project, without any picture either. The software often became unresponsive for short periods of time, even on a Core 2 Duo PC.

Buying this latest version of Studio is a gamble. Every time it stopped responding or behaved erratically, our hearts sank as we assumed the worst. Often we were pleasantly surprised, as Studio sprang back to life after a few seconds. However, competing software such as Sony Vegas Movie Studio manages to manipulate video without unexpected little rests.

Even without with these concerns, Studio is a decent but not outstanding editor. It's more capable than Ulead VideoStudio or Roxio VideoWave and, on a good day, more pleasant to use, too. However, Adobe Premiere Elements and Sony Vegas Movie Studio Platinum beat Studio hands down for power and, once you get over their more professional-looking appearances, are just as straightforward to use.

Ben Pitt

Also consider...

SYMANTEC

Norton Ghost 10

★★★★★

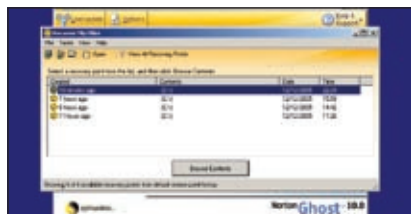
£35 inc VAT



It stands to reason that, at some point, your PC will go wrong and you'll need to turn to backups to get it working again. Symantec's Norton Ghost 10 aims to make this task as easy as possible.

It automatically makes a complete image of your PC, operating system and all. When you restore an image, you will get all your data and all your settings back the way you want them. This is an essential program for PC owners.

DISK-IMAGING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 300MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 160MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE 10439689-IN
SUPPLIER www.savastore.com **DETAILS** www.symantec.co.uk
 ✓ Powerful and easy to use ✗ Restore CD changed our system clock **FULL REVIEW** Apr 2006



ADOBE

Dreamweaver 8

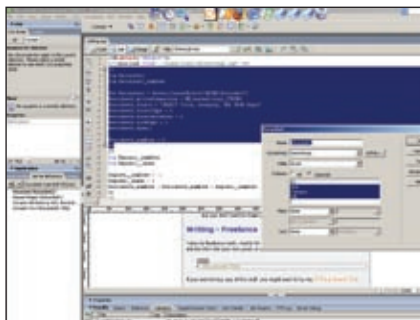
★★★★★

£285 inc VAT



If you have anything to do with developing professional websites, Dreamweaver 8 is the best £316 you'll ever spend. It is miles ahead of the competition, and it has all the tools you're likely to need, whether you want to design the look of a site or incorporate dynamic data. It's too expensive for the home user, though.

WEB-DESIGN SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 650MB disk space, 1,024x768-pixel display
SUPPLIER www.savastore.com **DETAILS** www.adobe.com ✓ Improved CSS interface ✗ Too expensive for most home users **FULL REVIEW** Dec 2005



MICROSOFT

Windows Live Messenger 8.0

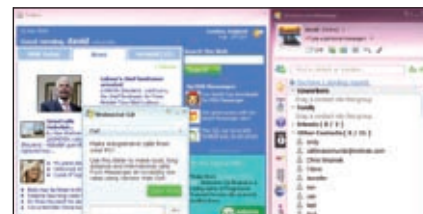
★★★★★

Free

Windows Live Messenger 8.0 is Microsoft's instant messaging client. The new version retains the original excellent chat features, but you can now use it to talk to Yahoo! users, too. It also introduces file sharing with friends.

The biggest new feature is worldwide voice calling, similar to that of Skype. While it's not quite as easy to use, it's well priced and a good choice if you make only the occasional call.

INSTANT-MESSAGING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP, 233MHz processor, 128MB RAM, up to 65MB disk space, Internet Explorer 6 SP1
SUPPLIER Microsoft 08706 010100
DETAILS www.microsoft.com ✓ Excellent instant messaging and competitive call rates ✗ Skype has better call features **FULL REVIEW** Oct 2006



AVANQUEST RadioTracker 2

★★★★★

£20 inc VAT



We were great fans of the original RadioTracker. It made building a large collection of music and finding new tracks really simple, by automatically downloading songs from Shoutcast internet radio stations and saving them as MP3 files complete with ID3 tags. RadioTracker 2 aims to improve on this with more advanced filtering to get you the songs you want.

At its most simple, it's very similar to the original. You simply have to choose the number of internet radio stations from which you want to download at once (the more you choose, the more bandwidth it will use of your broadband connection), and the genre of music you like, although it would be nice if you could pick multiple genres. The software starts filling your hard disk up with new music. To make sure you don't run out of disk space or internet bandwidth, you can choose the maximum amount of data you want to download, the amount of time you want to spend downloading and the maximum amount of bandwidth to use.

To make sure that you get what you want, though, RadioTracker 2

SUMMARY

- ✓ Downloads the music you want
- ✓ The Wishlist is excellent
- ✗ Can't delete unwanted tracks

MP3 DOWNLOAD SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 128MB RAM, 500MHz processor, 100MB disk space
SUPPLIER <http://shop.avanquest.com>
DETAILS www.avanquest.com

has finer control over the music you download than the previous version. For a start, you can pick your favourite radio stations and scan only music from them. There's a list with thousands of radio stations, though, so working your way through them to find your favourites can take a while. After leaving our PC downloading overnight, we found that the results are varied and while there were a fair number of tracks we didn't want, we got lots of new tracks we liked.

The best new feature is the Wishlist option. This lets you select the artist, album and track that you want to record from a list. There are over 250,000 songs in the list, and each entry tells you how regularly that song is played, so you have an idea how likely it is to crop up again.

If you can't find the song you're after, you can add a new entry manually. The software scans for your Wishlist entries, downloading your song automatically. You can keep scanning for other songs at the same time or you can just look for your Wishlist.



▲ The Wishlist feature lets you scan internet radio stations for a much-wanted track

The first version of RadioTracker had no way of playing back downloaded tracks, which was quite annoying. This version has fixed that with a simple playback window, which lists the latest tracks you've downloaded. The software also downloads album art and, if available, lyrics to the song. However, you can't delete tracks that you don't want from this interface. Instead, you have to go to the downloaded music folder and delete them there.

Radio stations talk over the start and end of tracks, so that you can't get a perfect copy, so RadioTracker 2 is set to fade the start and end of the track by two seconds. If you'd rather hear the whole broadcast, you can change this option.

RadioTracker 2 is a big improvement over its predecessor and, for just £20, it is an excellent way to discover new music and increase your collection.

David Ludlow

Also consider...

3AM LABS LogMeIn

★★★★★

Free; Professional edition \$13 (around £7) per month



If you've ever needed to access your PC while you've been away, LogMeIn is just the software for you. The free version gives you full remote control of your PC over the internet and works brilliantly.

The Professional version adds support for file transfers and guest invitations, and lets you use email to send links to files on your PC. It's an excellent piece of software for anyone who does a lot of remote work.

REMOTE CONTROL SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 or later, Internet Explorer, broadband internet connection
SUPPLIER www.3amlabs.com **DETAILS** www.logmein.com
 ✓ Simple remote control of a PC ✗ Java application not very fast **FULL REVIEW** Sep 2005



MICROSOFT Encarta Reference Library 2007

★★★★★

£40 inc VAT



Encarta is the best encyclopedia you can get for your PC. It's easy to search and illustrates a lot of its entries with multimedia items that really help kids learn. Its articles are quite short, but external links take you to more in-depth content. It provides a stunning balance of facts and fun.

ENCYCLOPEDIA Requires 600MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 850MB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** 83012047
SUPPLIER www.johnlewis.com **DETAILS** www.microsoft.com
 ✓ Friendly interface and excellent multimedia ✗ Lacks depth in some articles **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



ROXIO Easy Media Creator 9 Suite

★★★★★

£48 inc VAT



This suite comes with all the media-editing tools you'll ever need. Its greatest strengths are its tight integration between all the modules and its friendly, task-oriented interface. With capable editing tools, it's great value and the best media suite you can buy, although there's not enough difference to warrant upgrading from version 8.

MEDIA SUITE Requires Windows XP/Vista, 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 1GB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** 227000UK
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.dabs.com
 ✓ Excellent media-editing tools ✗ Little reason to upgrade from Creator 8 **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



3AM LABS LogMeIn Hamachi

★★★★★

Basic version free; Premium from £2.60 per month



The internet might be brilliant for letting a large number of people communicate with one another, but if you want some privacy to play games and share files with your friends, it's a nightmare to set up. LogMeIn's Hamachi aims to change that by letting you build a secure virtual LAN over the internet.

Hamachi works by creating a second, virtual network card on your computer that connects to your private Hamachi networks. Creating a network is as simple as naming it and assigning a password. Simply email these details to whoever you want to join your network. Initially, the connection is handled through

LogMeIn's servers, but the network soon moves to a peer-to-peer connection.

While the application setup is straightforward,

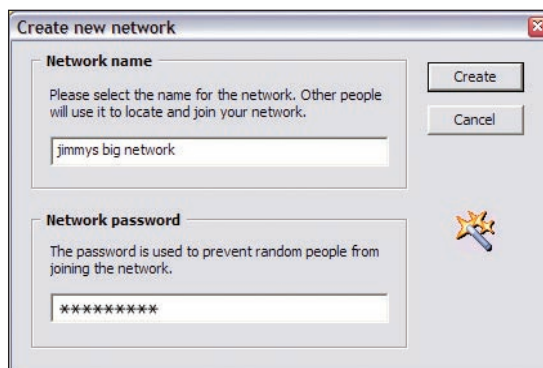
you still need to know a bit about Windows networking, file sharing and firewall settings before you can confidently connect to or establish a Hamachi network without ruining your existing network settings. A comprehensive online help forum guides you through Windows network settings, common applications and firewall configuration but, just like a real network, don't be surprised if it takes a bit of trial and error to get it right.

The crux of Hamachi is what it lets other applications achieve. As your computer behaves as though it's on a local network, you can print, play games, share files and run network applications as though you are physically connected. It also provides a secure tunnel for remote

SUMMARY

- ✓ Secure remote access
- ✓ Acts like a local network
- ✗ Can be tricky to set up

VPN SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 300MHz processor, 128MB RAM, internet connection
SUPPLIER www.logmein.com
DETAILS www.hamachi.cc



▲ In LogMeIn Hamachi, creating a network is as easy as naming it and assigning a password

access and remote-assistance software. One unexpected advantage is that iTunes treats Hamachi as a normal network, so you can play music from your friends' computers.

There are no adverts, banners or spyware and the free client is valid for life. The premium version, which costs from £2.60 per month, lets you build virtual networks of more than 16 clients and gives you more versatile control of the networks you create. This is a useful, no-nonsense application for network creation, but it's not for the complete novice.

David McKinnon

MOZILLA Firefox 2.0

★★★★★

Free



Firefox 2.0 is the much-anticipated follow-up to our favourite web browser and Mozilla's reply to Microsoft's excellent Internet Explorer 7. While Microsoft made some brave interface changes, Mozilla has retained the look and feel of Firefox. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, as the clean interface is easy to use and users of the previous version will feel right at home. Should you want to update the look and feel of the browser, there are several downloadable skins.

Underneath this exterior, Mozilla has made some significant changes. The biggest addition is the Internet Explorer-like Phishing filter. This checks every site you visit against a local list of known phishing sites or a constantly updated one held by Google. This option requires Firefox to send Google a list of every page you visit. If you're uncomfortable with this, stick to the local list or turn off the feature.

One of Firefox's best features was Fast Find, which let you find keywords on a webpage by typing, rather than having to bring up the Find dialog box. This still isn't provided by Microsoft.

This feature makes it to Firefox 2.0, but there's no Next button to find the next occurrence of a word. If you want to do this you either have to use the keyboard short cut (Ctrl-G) or bring up the

Find dialog box. It's a shame that this feature isn't quite as easy to use.

Navigation has been improved, with webpages set to open automatically in new tabs by default. Each tab now has a close button, so they're easier to shut down, too. The best new Tabs feature, though, is the Resume option. If your web browser crashes, it asks the next time you start it if you want to reload all the tabs from the point you left them.

For anyone who's had the annoyance of losing lots of tabs, this is a real lifesaver. If you close a tab by mistake, the History menu has a list of recently closed tabs, so you can restore it easily. Finally, you can drag and drop tabs around, so you can get them in the order you want.

It's also easier to add new alternative search engines to the search box. Perhaps one of the smartest features is the Keyword search. For any site with a search engine, you can set a bookmark with a keyword, such as 'Shopper' for www.computershopper.co.uk. Typing the keyword and search criteria into the Address bar

– Shopper Microsoft, for example – searches that site. It's brilliant for all the sites that you visit often, and it's easy to use.

RSS feeds are also handled better. By default, they're added to the Bookmark bar that runs just



▲ It's easier to add alternative search engines and there's a Keyword search so you can set a bookmark with a keyword

above the Tabs. Selecting one pulls up a drop-down list of the latest entries to that site. It's a much quicker and easier way of handling feeds than Internet Explorer or Opera provides, but the entries don't display summary information. However, you can change Firefox's options so it uses the RSS reader of your choice instead.

The biggest problem with using Firefox was that a lot of sites didn't work with it. Firefox 2.0 is a big improvement and worked with some sites that we used to have problems with, such as www.odeon.co.uk. That said, Firefox 2.0 has no support for ActiveX, so you can't use it with sites that need this technology, such as a lot of banking websites. This means you'll still need to keep a copy of Internet Explorer to hand.

Slick and easy to use, Firefox 2.0 retains all the features we loved from the original, while its new features make it even slicker and easier to use. Without a doubt, this is the best web browser you can get.

David McKinnon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Keyword searching for websites
- ✓ Reloads tabs after a crash
- ✗ Fast Find no longer has a Next button

WEB BROWSER Requires Windows 98 or later, 233MHz processor, 64MB RAM, 50MB disk space
DETAILS www.mozilla.com